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(54) Plasmids coding for B. Thuringiensis crystal protein, their production and their use in creating genetically engineered bacterial strains, the aforesaid strains per se and their use in producing said protein, said protein so-produced, insecticidal formulations comprising the same and a method of producing an insecticidal effect.

(57) The crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis is an insecticidal substance. Unfortunately growth phase limitations are exhibited by B. thuringiensis in producing this protein. This invention, however, provides a plasmid capable of replication in a bacterial host species and containing expressible heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis and including an expression mechanism for said heterologous DNA which is recognized by the host species system but does not exhibit substantial growth phase limitations in the bacterial host species. Genetically engineered bacterial host strains transformed by the plasmids of the invention express B. thuringiensis crystal proteins without exhibiting the aforesaid growth phase limitations.

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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. ³)
D,P X	PROC. NATL. ACAD. SCI. USA, vol.78, no.5, May 1981, (US) H.E. SCHNEPF ET AL:: "Cloning and expression of the Bacillus thuringiensis crystal protein gene in Escherichia coli", pages 2893-2897	1-18	C 12 N 15/00 C 12 P 21/00 C 12 N 1/00 A 01 N 63/02 // C 12 R 1/07 C 12 R 1/19
A	CHEMICAL ABSTRACTS, vol.93, no.5, August 4, 1980, page 481, abstract no.41304r, Columbus, Ohio (US) A.W.M. PHYLLIS et al.: "Genetic manipulation in the insect pathogen Bacillus thuringiensis". & Plasmids Transposons, (Proc. Annu. Symp. Sci. Basis Med.) 4th 1979 (Pub.1980), 155-61		
A	CHEMICAL ABSTRACTS, vol.92, no.5, February 4, 1980, page 409, abstract no.37544f, Columbus, Ohio (US) A.F. KLIER et al.: "Structure of cloned ribonomal DNA cistrons from Bacillus thuringiensis". & Nucleic Acids Res. 1979, 7(4), 997-1010		TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl. ³) C 12 N C 12 P C 12 R

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	10-01-1983	DESCAMPS J.A.

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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A : technological background
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E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date
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(54) **Plasmids coding for B. Thuringiensis crystal protein, their production and their use in creating genetically engineered bacterial strains, the aforesaid strains per se and their use in producing said protein, said protein so-produced, insecticidal formulations comprising the same and a method of producing an insecticidal effect.**

(57) The crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis is an insecticidal substance. Unfortunately growth phase limitations are exhibited by B. thuringiensis in producing this protein. This invention, however, provides a plasmid capable of replication in a bacterial host species and containing expressible heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis and including an expression mechanism for said heterologous DNA which is recognized by the host species system but does not exhibit substantial growth phase limitations in the bacterial host species. Genetically engineered bacterial host strains transformed by the plasmids of the invention express B. thuringiensis crystal proteins without exhibiting the aforesaid growth phase limitations.

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PLASMIDS CODING FOR B. THURINGIENSIS CRYSTAL PROTEIN, THEIR PRODUCTION AND THEIR USE IN CREATING GENETICALLY ENGINEERED BACTERIAL STRAINS, THE AFORESAID STRAINS PER SE AND THEIR USE IN PRODUCING SAID PROTEIN, SAID PROTEIN SO-PRODUCED, INSECTICIDAL FORMULATIONS COMPRISING THE SAME AND A METHOD OF PRODUCING AN INSECTICIDAL EFFECT

The invention describes novel genetically engineered plasmids. Examples of such plasmids have been deposited with the American Type Culture Collection, Rockville, Maryland 20852 under the Budapest Treaty. Plasmid pES1 has been assigned ATCC Number 31995, plasmid pJWK20 has been assigned ATCC Number 31997, and plasmid pJWK18 has been assigned ATCC Number 31998.

This invention relates generally to the production of substances for the control of insects injurious to certain plants. More particularly, the invention relates to an improved means for producing substances toxic to larvae of the tobacco hornworm Manduca sexta and related species.

As is well known, the crystal protein made by B. thuringiensis is toxic to the larvae of a number of lepidopteran insects. Preparations containing crystals are used commercially as a highly selective biological insecticide. However, problems connected with the use of such insecticides, together with relatively high

manufacturing costs, have made it difficult, in many cases, for such insecticides to compete effectively with other commercially available products.

The fact that B. thuringiensis produces the crystal protein only during sporulation represents a significant disadvantage in connection with the manufacture and use of the crystals. Such a growth phase limitation, particularly in an industrial process, can result in inconvenience and excessive time requirements during manufacture. In fact, certain pressures resulting from growth phase limitations or other factors may even result in strains of B. thuringensis losing their ability to produce the crystals. Such acrystalliferous strains do not have insecticidal activity.

The present invention discloses and embraces plasmids (and their manufacture) that are capable of replication in a bacterial host species and that contain expressible heterologous DNA encoding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis. The plasmids further include an expression mechanism for the heterologous DNA which is recognized by the host species' system but does not exhibit any substantial growth phase limitations in the bacterial host species. In another aspect, the invention comprises genetically engineered bacterial strains transformed by such plasmids and, in a further aspect, the manufacture or creation of such strains.

Bacterial strains genetically engineered to contain the recombinant plasmids of the present invention can be produced by transformation and can express B. thuringiensis crystal protein. A method of preparing the protein by growing such strains is included in the invention. The protein produced by these genetically engineered strains is toxic to the larvae of a number of lepidopteran insects. Such protein so-produced is included in the invention. Preparations or formulations containing these

crystals can be used as a highly selective biological insecticide and are also included in the invention as is a method of producing an insecticide in an environment using such protein, preparations or formulations in a standard manner or by exposing the environment to growth of a genetically engineered strain as aforesaid.

Thus, the invention provides an insecticidal formulation or preparation comprising B. thuringiensis crystal protein produced as aforesaid.

The invention, of course, provides a method of producing a plasmid of the invention which comprises isolating from a crystal protein-producing strain of Bacillus thuringiensis a first fragment of DNA comprising a expressible DNA coding for the crystal protein, providing one or more other DNA fragments which contribute(s) an expression mechanism for heterologous DNA in a selected bacterial host other than B. thuringiensis,the expression mechanism beign recognized by the host without exhibiting substantial growth phase limitations, and ligating said first DNA fragment and said other fragment(s) in the correct arrangement for expression of the heterologous crystal protein-producing DNA coding in the host.

As indicated earlier, the invention also includes a method of creating a genetically engineered bacterial strain which is capable of producing the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis comprising transforming a host bacterial strain other than B. thuringiensis by introducing thereinto a plasmid of the invention whereby the expressible genetic material in the host includes heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

In accordance with a preferred form of the invention, novel recombinant plasmids are created when

the known cloning vector plasmid pBR322, Bolivar et al, Gene 2:95-113 (1977), is combined with plasmid fragments obtained from plasmids harbored by strains of B. thuringiensis. The "large plasmid fraction" is especially preferred. This "large plasmid fraction" includes fragments having a size greater than about 10 megadaltons. The plasmids harbored by strains of B. thuringiensis are believed to be responsible for the production of the crystal protein in B. thuringiensis. The B. thuringiensis plasmid fragments used to construct the recombinant crystal protein coding plasmids of the present invention can be derived from a variety of B. thuringiensis strains, some of which are publicly available. For example, B. thuringiensis variety Kurstaki HD-1 is available from the Agricultural Research Culture Collection (NRRL) in Peoria, Illinois, U.S.A. It has been awarded NRRL Number B-3792. B. thuringiensis variety Kurstaki HD-73 is also available from the Agricultural Research Culture Collection. It has been awarded NRRL Number B-4488. In the Examples given hereinafter the use of several B. thuringiensis strains is illustrated. Such Examples are included for illustrative purposes only and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention to use of fragments derived from such strains.

The invention will now be further described and illustrated by the following Examples, and by reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:-

FIGURE 1 is an agarose gel analysis of plasmid DNAs and marker DNA fragments comprising a photograph of 0.7% (lanes 1-5) and 0.35% (lanes 6 and 7) agarose slab gels stained with ethidium bromide;

FIGURE 2 is a hybridization analysis of plasmid DNAs transferred to nitrocellulose comprising a

photograph of a 0.7% ethidium bromide stained agarose gel (lanes 1-3) and autoradiograms of ^{32}P labeled plasmids (lanes 4-12); and

FIGURE 3 is a photograph showing a radioimmune assay of crystal protein and proteins produced by bacterial strain ES12 before and after digestion with trypsin; and

FIGURE 4 is a photograph of an ethidium bromide stained gel showing plasmids detected in extracts of different strains of B. thuringiensis.

Example IV, given hereinafter, is a survey of B. thuringiensis strains for plasmid content and the ability of these plasmids to hybridize with a particular genetic probe for identification of the crystal protein gene.

EXAMPLE I

Use of B. thuringiensis variety kurstaki HD-1-Dipel plasmid DNA fragments in the construction of recombinant plasmids in accordance with the present invention.

Crystal-producing strains of B. thuringiensis vary in the number and sizes of the plasmids they contain. Plasmids obtained from B. thuringiensis variety kurstaki HD-1-Dipel range in molecular mass from approximately 47 to 1.32 megadaltons as shown in lane 1 of FIGURE 1, which shows the total plasmid complement normally obtained from this strain. Larger plasmids are present in this strain but were not readily detected as closed circular forms under the conditions of growth used in this study. However, plasmid fractions isolated from B. thuringiensis contained small amounts of the linearized forms of these large plasmids. Two plasmid fractions were obtained from the B. thuringiensis variety kurstaki HD-1-Dipel strain, as shown in lanes 2 and 3 of FIGURE 1. One fraction, shown in lane 2, contained the 47, 32 and 30 megadalton plasmids as well as trace amounts of linearized forms of the very large

plasmids of B. thuringiensis (molecular weight x 10^6 shown on left). The second fraction contained smaller plasmids of 4, 9, 5.2, 5.5 and 9.6 megadaltons, as shown in lane 3.

A preferred recombinant plasmid of the invention, designated pES1 (ATCC Number 31995), is shown in lane 4 of FIGURE 1 in which the gel analysis of the plasmid may be compared with pBR322, shown in lane 5. After digestion by an enzyme which cuts the plasmid once, the linearized plasmid had a mobility corresponding to ca. 11 x 10^6 M_r when compared to Hind III digested lambda DNA (shown in lanes 6 and 7 of FIGURE 1). Molecular weights (x 10^{-6}) on the right of the Figure refer to the Hind III digest of lambda DNA. The arrow on the right in FIGURE 1 marks the origin for lanes 6 and 7.

In constructing recombinant plasmids, such as pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) according to the invention, the following detailed procedures were followed. These procedures are also outlined in Schnepf and Whiteley, Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA, 78:2893-2897 (1981). They are given only by way of example and are not intended to limit the scope of the claims herein.

The two separated plasmid fractions, designated as "large" and "small", obtained from B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-1-Dipel were digested with varying dilutions of Sau3A1. This was monitored by agarose gel electrophoresis. To generate a source of inserts, the "large plasmid fraction" was digested with the minimum amount of enzyme needed to convert all the closed covalent circular molecules to the linear form. Restriction endonucleases Sal I, Hind III, BamH 1 and Sau3A1 were used as recommended by the manufacturer (New England Biolabs). This resulted in fragments with an average size greater than 10 megadaltons. For the "small plasmid fraction", an amount of Sau3A1 was used

which left some closed covalent circular molecules, but produced few linear fragments under 2 x 10^6 M_r in size.

Each fraction was then ligated to pBR322 that had been opened by digestion with the restriction enzyme Bam Hl. Plasmid pBR322 was isolated from E. coli strain HB101 (pBR322) as outlined by Blair et al Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA, 69:2518-2522 (1972). Plasmid pBR322 is on deposit with ATCC, is publicly available and its accession number is ATCC 31071. DNA fragments (3 ug of B. thuringiensis plasmid DNA and 0.15 ug of pBR322 DNA in a volume of 10 ul) were ligated as described for cohesive ends by Maniatis et al in Cell 15:667-701 (1978).

Recombinants were then screened and selected. Staphylococcus Protein A (Pharmacia) was labeled with ^{125}I (Amersham) using chloramine T as described by Erlich et al, Cell 13:681-689 (1978). The DNA polymerase I-catalysed fill-in reaction described by Maniatis et al Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA, 72:1184-1188 (1975) was used to label DNA fragments of Sau3Al digests with [a-^{32}P]dCTP (Amersham).

Plasmids were obtained from B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-1-Dipel, kindly provided by Dr. Lee A. Bulla, Jr., according to the method for plasmid screening of White and Nester, J. Bacteriol. 141:1134-1141 (1980). All plasmid preparations were additionally purified by centrifugation in cesium chloride-ethidium bromide gradients. Samples (100 ug DNA per gradient) for cloning experiments were fractionated by centrifugation through 5-25% sucrose gradients for 2.5 hours at 35,000 RPM in an International B-60 centrifuge using the SB-283 rotor. Electrophoresis in agarose gels was used to analyze plasmid DNAs as described by Meyers et al, J. Bacteriol. 127:1529-1537 (1976). Fragments of the plasmids were produced by digestion of DNA with restriction enzymes as is known in the art. Hybridization to plasmid DNAs was performed after partial depurination as described by

Wahl et al, Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA, 76:3683-3687 (1979) and transfer of DNA from gels to nitrocellulose was done as described by Thomashow et al Cell 19:729-739 (1980).

The recombinant plasmids thus produced were then transformed into E. coli. Transformation was carried out as described by known procedures and transformants were selected on media containing 100 ug/ml ampicillin. Since cloning was performed by insertion of messenger DNA into the BamH 1 site of pBR322, which is located in a gene coding for tetracycline resistance, ampicillin resistant transformants were screened for sensitivity to tetracycline (25 ug/ml). Colonies resistant to ampicillin but sensitive to tetracycline were presumed to contain inserts.

Those transformed colonies presumed to carry B. thuringiensis DNA inserts were then screened for the production of crystal protein antigen using antibodies and ^{125}I-Protein A. To prepare antibodies to the crystals, the crystals were first purified from sporulated cultures of B. thuringiensis grown in modified G medium, Aronson et al, J. Bacteriol. 106:1016-1025 (1971), by four successive centrifugations in Renograffin (Squibb) gradients. Contamination with spores was estimated at less than 0.1% by phase microscopy. Solubilized crystals were electrophoresed on preparative 10% polyacrylamide slab gels containing $NaDodSo_4$, and the portion of the gel containing the major crystal protein polypeptide was sliced from the gel, crushed, mixed with an equal amount of Freund's Complete Adjuvant and used to immunize rabbits. The immunoglobulin G fraction was purified from the serum of the immunized rabbits by precipitation with ammonium sulfate and chromatography on DEAE cellulose and analyzed by Ouchterlony immunodiffusion, as is known in

the art.

To screen by detection of antigens, colonies were first transferred from agar plates to filter paper and denatured with phenol-chloroform-heptane and chloroform-methanol as described by Henning et al, Anal. Biochem. 97:153-157 (1979). The filters were soaked in 1% bovine serum albumen (Sigma, fraction V) and incubated with antibody and ^{125}I-Protein A as described by Renart et al, Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA, 76:3116-3120, (1979). Colonies containing material capable of reacting with the crystal protein antibodies were detected by autoradiography. The concentrations of antibody (10^{-3} to 10^{-4} dilution) and ^{125}I-Protein A (0.2 to 1 x 10^{6}cpm) were varied to obtain conditions permitting the detection of 5 ng crystal protein in 1 ul spotted on a filter while colonies of E. coli HB101 (pBR322) were either unreactive or appeared light against a grey background. Protein samples were electrophoresed on 10% $NaDodSO_4$/polyacrylamide slab gels, transferred electrophoretically to nitrocellulose, and incubated with antibody (5 x 10^{-3} dilution) and ^{125}I-Protein A (6 x 10^{5}cpm) in accordance with known procedures. The reaction of transferred peptides with antibody and ^{125}I-Protein A was detected by radioautography.

Cells grown for 16 hours in L broth containing 100 ug/ml ampicillin were harvested by centrifugation, suspended in 0.1 M Tris buffer at pH 7.0, 1mM EDTA, 200 ug/ml phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride and disrupted by sonication. Insoluble material, obtained by centrifugation of the sonicates at 100,000 x g for 30 minutes, was thoroughly suspended in 4M urea, 0.285M 2-mercaptoethanol, 0.05M $NaHCO_3$, pH 9.5, and dialysed against 0.05M Tris buffer pH 7.4 for insect toxicity assays or for electrophoretic analysis. For proteolyis with subtilisin or trypsin, the samples were prepared as

above substituting 0.05M cyclohexylaminoethane sulfonic acid (CHES), pH 10.0, 0.285M 2-mercaptoethanol for pH 9.5 urea buffer; final dialysis was against 0.01M CHES buffer, pH 10.0. For trypsin digestion, 0.01M CHES was used as the buffer and digestion was carried out at room temperature during dialysis against that buffer; digestion with subtilisin was performed according to Cleveland et al, J. Biol. Chem. 252:1102-1106 (1977). The reactions were stopped by boiling the samples in electrophoresis sample buffer and polypeptides capable of reacting with antibody to the crystal protein were detected using ^{125}I-Protein A and radioautography as described above. Protein concentrations were determined according to Bradford, Anal. Biochem. 72:248-254 (1976).

The recombinant plasmid pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) consists of the plasmid vector pBR322 and DNA homologous to the 30, 32 and 47 megadalton plasmids, as well as DNA homologous to linearized forms of the very large plasmids of B. thuringiensis. One explanation for this result is that several Sau3A1 partial digest fragments from each of the large B. thuringiensis plasmids, were ligated together; this heteromultimer could then have been ligated into the vector. Another possibility is that the apparent hybridization to the 47 megadalton plasmid as shown in FIGURE 2, is actually a trailing artifact from the 30 or 32 megadalton plasmids.

EXAMPLE II

Evidence that E. coli transformed by recombinant plasmids of the present invention produce B. thuringiensis crystal protein.

The recombinant plasmids of the present invention can be used to transform E. coli cells. These transformed cells produce B. thuringiensis crystal protein. Such transformation is possible because the

recombinant plasmids of the present invention contain both vector DNA and DNA from B. thuringiensis plasmids that codes for the crystal protein. Plasmid pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) was used to demonstrate this.

As illustrated in FIGURE 2, plasmid pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) contains substantial homology with DNA from the plasmid pBR322 as well as DNA homologous to the 30, 32 and 47 megadalton plasmids as well as DNA homologous to linearized forms of the very large plasmids of B. thuringiensis. In FIGURE 2, lanes 1-3 show a photograph of a 0.7% ethidium bromide-stained agarose gel: Lane 1 shows BamH 1 digested pBR322 DNA; lane 2 shows total plasmid complement of B. thuringiensis and lane 3 shows the "large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis. Lanes 4-6 show an autoradiogram of ^{32}P-labeled pBR322 DNA hybridized with: BamH 1 digested pBR322 DNA, as shown in lane 4; total plasmid complement, as shown in lane 5; and the "large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis, as shown in lane 6. Lanes 7-9 show an autoradiogram of ^{32}P-labeled pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) DNA hybridized with: BamH 1 digested pBR322, as shown in lane 7; total plasmid complement, as shown in lane 8; and "the large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis, as shown in lane 9. Lanes 1-12 show an autoradiogram of ^{32}P-labeled total B. thuringiensis plasmid DNA hybridized with: BamH 1 digested pBR322 DNA as shown in lane 10; total plasmid complement, as shown in lane 11; and the "large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis, as shown in lane 12. The arrows in this Figure show the position of the linearized fragments and the hybridization of the probe to such fragments.

FIGURE 3 presents a radioimmune assay of crystal protein produced by transformed E. coli strain ES12 before and after digestion with trypsin.

Autoradiograms of a solid-phase radioimmune assay for polypeptides are shown in lanes 1-3 of FIGURE 3. These fragments react with anti-crystal antibody following $NaDodSO_4$/polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. Lane 1 shows 1 ug B. thuringiensis crystal protein. Lane 2 shows 100 ug E. coli HB101 (pBR322) protein extract. Lane 3 shows 100 ug ES12 protein extract. Lane 4 is derived from dissolved B. thuringiensis crystals reacted with 5% (wt/wt) trypsin at pH 10 for 3 hours at room temperature. Lanes 5-7 show the ES12 extract reacted with: 2% (wt/wt) trypsin, as shown in lane 5; 4% (wt/wt) trypsin, as shown in lane 6; and 6% (wt/wt) trypsin at pH 10 for 3 hours at room temperature, as shown in lane 7.

Lanes 1-3 of FIGURE 3 show that the antigen made by ES12, which reacted with crystal protein antibodies, had the same electrophoretic mobility as the B. thuringiensis crystal protein. Dissolved B.thuringiensis crystals and cell extracts of HB101 (pBR322) and ES12 were electrophoresed on a $NaDodSO_4$/polyacrylamide gel and reacted with anti-crystal antibody and ^{125}I-Protein A after transfer to nitrocellulose. The ES12 extract, shown in lane 3 of FIGURE 3, contained a polypeptide antigen having the same (or very similar) electrophoretic mobility as the dissolved B. thuringiensis crystals shown in lane 1 of FIGURE 3. This polypeptide antigen was missing from a similar extract of HB101 (pBR322), as shown in lane 2 of FIGURE 3, and was not detected when pre-immune serum was substituted for anti-crystal antibody, or when ^{125}I-Protein A was used without prior antibody treatment (data not shown).

Comparison of the bands shown in FIGURE 3 (1 ug crystal protein in lane 1) with the total amount of protein applied to lane 3 (100 ug) indicates that the crystal protein antigen accounts for a small amount of

the protein (1% or less) in ES12. When the radioimmune detection of polypeptide was used to monitor the fractionation of ES12 extracts it was found that a reducing agent plus a denaturant or an alkali pH was required to solubilize the crystal protein antigen. These conditions are also required to solubilize B. thuringiensis crystals.

It has been reported by Lilley et al, J. Gen. Microbiol. 118:1-11 (1980) that the crystal protein can be digested by a number of proteases at pH 10 to produce primarily a single polypeptide. Lanes 4-7 of FIGURE 3 show the results of an experiment where dissolved B. thuringiensis crystals and an eluate from the particulate fraction of ES12 were subjected to partial digestion at pH 10 with the indicated amounts of trypsin. As seen in lanes 5, 6, and 7 of FIGURE 3, digestion of the ES12 extract with increasing amounts of trypsin yielded a pattern, as shown in lane 7 of FIGURE 3, which was similar to the pattern produced by trypsin digestion of the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis, as shown in lane 4 of FIGURE 3. Qualitatively the patterns of the bands generated from the two preparations were similar. The quantitative, and minor qualitative, differences may reflect a less efficient digestion of the crystal protein antigen in ES12 extracts due to the presence of numerous other polypeptide species.

The larger number of polypeptides produced by trypsin digestion of the crystal protein in these experiments as opposed to the number reported by Lilley et al, supra, may be due to differences in the conditions of trypsin treatment. Similar experiments using subtilisin also showed agreement in the electrophoretic mobilities of the bands produced from the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis was obtained by assaying for insect toxicity. Extracts of particulate fractions obtained from E. coli HB101 (pBR322) and ES12

were mixed with feed meal supplied to neonate caterpillars of the tobacco hornworn Manduca sexta. Neonate larvae of the Manduca sexta were supplied by Drs. J. Truman and L. Riddiford, Department of Zoology, University of Washington. Extracts were prepared as described above from 8 liters of the appropriate E. coli strains; 6-8 mls of extract were mixed with 50 ml of molten agar-based diet and quickly poured to give a shallow layer. Strips of the solidified diet were placed in glass vials (3-4 ml/vial) with one neonate larva for 10 days at room temperature.

The results indicated that the extracts of the genetically engineered recombinant strain were toxic to caterpillars. The 15 larvae exposed to the ES12 extracts did not complete the first instar before death. An equivalent amount of extract from control strain, E. coli HB101 (pBR322), had no noticeable effect on the growth and development of 15 larvae through at least the third instar when compared to larvae grown on feed meal without any extract added. Identical results were obtained when this experiment was repeated with another set of E. coli extracts. The minimal amount of extract of ES12 required to kill the caterpillar larvae has not yet been determined. Assuming that the crystal protein antigen in the ES12 extracts was 0.5-1% of the total protein, then the feed meal prepared with the extract from ES12 contained 12-25 ug crystal protein per ml whereas a concentration of 2 ug/ml of pure crystal protein is sufficient to achieve 100% killing of the larvae.

The resulting transformed strain of E. coli, ES12, carries a recombinant plasmid and produces a protein antigen that reacts with antibodies specific for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis. This is confirmed by the above described tests wherein the recombinant plasmid isolated from this strain, pES1

(ATCC Number 31995) simultaneously transforms cultures of E. coli strain HB101 to both ampicillin resistance and the production of the crystal protein antigen, whereas the plasmid vector pBR322 transforms HB101 to ampicillin and tetracycline resistance but no crystal antigen can be detected. Test results indicate that the DNA insert of the recombinant plasmid pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) encodes the ability to make a polypeptide possesing properties similar to those of the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis. In fact, the results strongly suggest that the DNA insert of pES1 (ATCC Number 31995) encodes the gene for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis and that this gene is expressed in a biologically active form in E. coli. Preparations made from this new genetically engineered strain, ES12, may therefore be used as an insecticide for appropriate cases.

EXAMPLE III

Use of B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-73 (NRRL B-4488) plasmid DNA fragments in the construction of recombinant plasmids in accordance with the present invention.

B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-73 contains fewer so-called large plasmids than do some of the other B. thuringiensis strains. However, as this Example illustrates, this strain can be used to generate the DNA fragments utilized in constructing the recombinant plasmids of the present invention. The "large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-73 was obtained by sucrose gradient centrifugation in the same way as the "large plasmid fraction" from B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-1-Dipel described in Example I. Digestion of this fraction with restriction enzyme Bgl II yielded approximately six fragments, one of which hybridized with a Pvu II-C DNA probe obtained from pES1 (ATCC Number 31995). The probe is discussed more fully in Example IV. The "large plasmid fraction"

was digested with Bgl II, ligated to BamH I-digested pBR322 and transformed into E. coli. Colonies which were ampicillin-resistant and tetracycline-sensitive were screened for hybridization with the Pvu II-C DNA probe and for their ability to synthesize the crystal protein antigen. A strain was isolated designated JWK1, having a plasmid, pJWK20 (ATCC Number 31997), whose linearized mass is approximately 13.5 megadaltons. The results of preliminary analyses using Bgl II, Sal I, and Hind III digestion of pJWK20 and the "large plasmid fraction" from HD-73 suggest that pJWK20 has a single insert of approximately 10.9 megadaltons derived from the 45 megadalton plasmid of B. thuringiensis var. kurstaki HD-73.

Extracts of genetically engineered strain JWK1 were found to contain a polypeptide of approximately 130,000 M_r which reacted with the antibody to the crystal protein from HD-1-Dipel. The mobility of this peptide matched that of the crystal protein from HD-1-Dipel. Tests for insect toxicity showed that feed meal supplemented with extracts of transformed E. coli strain JWK1 where lethal for larvae of the tobacco hornworm. The onset of toxic symptoms was similar to that observed for larvae fed with meal containing solubilized crystal protein. As in previously described toxicity tests, meal containing extracts of E. coli (pBR322) did not retard the growth of the larvae. Thus it can be seen that genetically engineered E. coli strain JWK1 produces a protein which is similar in size, antigenicity and biological activities to the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis HD-1-Dipel.

EXAMPLE IV

Survey of B. thuringiensis strains for plasmid content and the ability of these plasmids to hybridize with a probe from pES1 (ATCC Number 31995).

Restriction enzyme analysis of transposon Tn5 inserts into pES1 (data not shown) indicates that a major portion of the presumed crystal protein gene is contained within two Pvu II cleavage sites on the B. thuringiensis plasmids. The cleavage sites define a Pvu II-C DNA fragment that can be used as a probe to analyze plasmid profiles of the various strains of B. thuringiensis to determine which plasmids contain the gene. The Pvu II-C probe fragment was purified by sucrose gradient sedementation. The DNA fragments were labeled with alpha-^{32}-P-dCTP using either the DNA polymerase-catalyzed fill-in reaction described by Maniatias et al, Cell 15:667-701 (1978), or by nick translation, described by Maniatias et al, Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA 72:1184-1188 (1975). The probe was then hybridized to plasmids from various B. thuringiensis strains after electrophoresis and transfer to nitrocellulose. At the time of filing, about twenty crystal-producing strains of B. thuringiensis had been examined for plasmid content and the ability of these plasmids to hybridize with the Pvu II-C probe fragment from pES1 (ATCC Number 31995). An example of one of the gels run as part of this survey is shown in Figure 4. The photograph is of an ethidium bromide stained gel that shows plasmids detected in extracts of various B.thuringiensis strains. Lane a is subspecies tolworthii; lane b is subspecies darmstadiensis; lane c is subspecies sotto; lanes d-g are var. thuringiensis F-10, HD-290, HD-120, and HD-2 respectively; lanes h-j are var. Kurstaki HD-244, HD-73 and HD-1, respectively. The numbers in the margin indicate plasmid size in megadaltons. Other gels were run (data not shown) with extracts from B. thuringiensis subspecies alesti HD-4, subspecies toumanoffi F-9, subspecies galleriae HD-8, subspecies wuhnanesis F-6, and subspecies morrisoni F-5. The results of the electrophoresis shown in FIGURE

4. demonstrated the presence of several plasmid bands in each one. Presumably, most of the bands consist of closed circular molecules although some bands may represent open circular forms. The strains varied greatly in the number and sizes of the plasmids they contained; however some bands of the same or similar mobilities were present in several strains. It is pointed out that the data presented in FIGURE 4 represent the analysis of routine CsCl-purified plasmid preparations and that no attempts have been made to verify conditions of growth, plasmid extraction or electrophoresis in order to detect all possible plasmids or to duplicate electrophoretic conditions used by other investigators. In addition, the sizes have been roughly estimated by comparisons with the mobilities of plasmids whose contour lengths have been determined by electron microscopy by Stahley et al, Biochem. Biophys. Res. Comm., 84:581-588 (1978).

The strains examined in the experiment shown in FIGURE 4 differ in flagellar serotype and in their ability to cross-react with the antibody to the crystal protein of strain HD-1-Dipel. The serotype of the kurstaki strains is 3a, 3b; the thuringiensis strains are type 1; the subspecies sotto is type 4a, 4b; subspecies darmstadiensis is type 10 and subspecies tolworthii is type 9. See De Barjac and Bonnefoi, C.R. Acad. Sci., 264:1811-1813 (1967). Fourteen of the twenty strains tested reacted with the antibody to the crystal protein of strain HD-1-Dipel and showed hybridization with Pvu II-C probe.

EXAMPLE V

Use of B. thuringiensis subspecies sotto plasmid DNA fragments in the construction of the recombinant plasmids of the present invention.

The procedures used to clone the crystal

protein gene from B. thuringiensis subspecies sotto are essentially the same procedures used to clone the gene from B. thuringiensis var. Kurstaki HD-73. The procedures are outlined in Example III.

The subspecies sotto was selected for cloning the crystal protein gene because it contains only two plasmids and belongs to a different serotype. To clone the gene, total plasmid DNA purified by centrifugation in a CsCl-ethidium bromide gradient was partially restricted with endonuclease Mbo I. The resulting fragments were ligated into the BamH I site of pBR322. After transformation into E. coli, colonies were selected which were ampicillin-resistant and tetracycline-sensitive. These colonies were screened for their ability to hybridize with the Pvu II-C fragment and for their ability to produce the crystal protein. One recombinant strain, JWK 11, contained the plasmid pJWK18; the size of the inserted B. thuringiensis plasmid DNA has not yet been determined accurately. Strain JWK 11 produces a 130,000 M_r protein which cross-reacts with antisera prepared against the crystal protein isolated from B. thuringiensis kurstaki HD-1-Dipel. Extracts of JWK 11 are toxic to larvae of Manduca sexta.

It may be seen therefore that, in accordance with the invention, crystal protein of B. thuringiensis is produced by a host strain transformed with recombinant plasmids. In vivo, B. thuringiensis only produces crystal protein during sporulation. An advantage of this invention is the absence of the necessity for the host to sporulate in order for expression of the crystal protein to occur. Expression of the genetic information in the plasmids of the invention is not limited to a specific growth phase in the host because the crystal protein is expressed in accordance with an expression mechanism that is

recognized by the host species in all major growth phases. By removing growth phase restrictions, production of the toxin is now possible by continuous culture rather than batch culture. This can permit high rate, high productivity fermentations with a decrease in capital equipment requirements.

Various modifications and variations within the scope of the invention in addition to the precise procedures shown and described herein will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the foregoing description and accompanying drawings.

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CLAIMS:

1. A plasmid capable of replication in a bacterial host species and containing expressible heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis and including an expression mechanism for said heterologous DNA which is recognized by the host species system but does not exhibit substantial growth phase limitations in the bacterial host species.

2. A plasmid as claimed in claim 1 comprising a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to the DNA coding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

3. A plasmid as claimed in claim 1 comprising a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to plasmids of B. thuringiensis having a molecular mass greater than 10×10^6 Mr.

4. A plasmid as claimed in claim 3, wherein said DNA portion is identified with a Pvu II-C DNA fragment probe or a probe having substantial sequence homology with a Pvu II-C probe.

5. A plasmid as claimed in claim 4, wherein said DNA portion is derived from B. thuringiensis subspecies tolworthi; subspecies darmstadiensis; subspecies sotto; subspecies thuringiensis; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-290; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-120; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-2; subspecies kurstaki, HD-244; subspecies kurstaki,

HD-73; subspecies kurstaki, HD-1; subspecies alesti, HD-4; subspecies toumanoffi, F-9; subspecies galleriae, HD-8; subspecies wuhnanesis, F-6; or subspecies morrisoni, F-5.

6. A plasmid according to claim 1 as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5 including a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to plasmid pBR322.

7. The plasmids pES1 (ATCC Number 31995), pJWK20 (ATCC Number 31997), and pJWK18 (ATCC Number 31998), a mutant plasmid having the B. thuringiensis crystal protein coding characteristics of said plasmid pES1, or pJWK20, or pJWK18, and progeny of any of said plasmids or mutant plasmids.

8. A bacterial strain containing a plasmid as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 or a plasmid, mutant plasmid or progeny thereof as claimed in claim 7.

9. The bacterial strains ES12, JWK1, and JWK11, in each case transformed by a plasmid as claimed in claim 1, and B. thuringiensis crystal protein antigen-producing mutants thereof.

10. A genetically engineered bacterial strain which has been transformed to introduce thereinto heterologous DNA which, upon expression, results in a polypeptide of 130,000 M_r which reacts specifically with antibody for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

11. B. thuringiensis crystal protein which has been produced by a genetically engineered bacterial strain transformed by introduction thereinto of a plasmid as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 or a plasmid, mutant plasmid or progeny thereof as claimed in claim 7, or by a bacterial strain as claimed in claim 9 or by a genetically engineered bacterial strain as claimed in claim 10.

12. An insecticidal formulation or preparation comprising a protein as claimed in claim 11 in a form suitable for insecticidal use, optionally including a diluent, carrier or excipient.

13. A method of producing an insecticidal effect in an environment which comprises treating the environment with a protein as claimed in claim 11 or with a formulation or preparation as claimed in claim 12 or exposing the environment to growth of a bacterial strain as claimed in claim 9 or growth of a genetically engineered bacterial strain as claimed in claim 10.

14. A method of producing as plasmid as claimed in any of claims 1 to 7 which comprises isolating from a crystal protein-producing strain of Bacillus thuringiensis a first fragment of DNA comprising an expressible DNA coding for the crystal protein, providing one or more other DNA fragments which contribute(s) an expression mechanism for heterologous DNA in a selected bacterial

host other than B. thuringiensis, the expression mechanism being recognized by said host without exhibiting substantial growth phase limitations, and ligating said first DNA fragment and said other fragment(s) in the correct arrangement for expression of the heterologous crystal protein-producing DNA coding in said host.

15. A method of creating a genetically engineered bacterial strain which is capable of producing the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis comprising transforming a host bacterial strain other than B. thuringiensis by introducing thereinto a plasmid as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, or a plasmid, mutant plasmid or progeny thereof as claimed in claim 7, whereby the expressible genetic material in the host includes heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

16. A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the host is E. coli.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16, wherein the host is ES12, JWK1 or JWK11.

18. A method of preparing Bacillus thuringiensis crystal protein comprising growing a bacterial strain as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 10 or which has been created by a method as claimed in any one of claims 15 to 17.

Additional set of claims
for AUSTRIA (Art. 167)

CLAIMS:

1. A method of producing a plasmid capable of replication in a bacterial host species and containing expressible heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis and including an expression mechanism for said heterologous DNA which is recognized by the host species system but does not exhibit substantial growth phase limitations in the bacterial host species, which method comprises isolating from a crystal protein-producing strain of Bacillus thuringiensis a first fragment of DNA comprising an expressible DNA coding for the crystal protein, providing one or more other DNA fragments which contribute(s) an expression mechanism for heterologous DNA in a selected bacterial host other than B. thuringiensis, the expression mechanism being recognized by said host without exhibiting substantial growth phase limitations, and ligating said first DNA fragment and said other fragment(s) in the correct arrangement for expression of the heterologous crystal protein-producing DNA coding in said host.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the plasmid comprises a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to the DNA coding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the

plasmid comprises a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to plasmids of B. thuringiensis having a molecular mass greater than 10 x 10^6 M_r.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein said DNA portion is identified with a Pvu II-C DNA fragment probe or a probe having substantial sequence homology with a Pvu II-C probe.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said DNA portion is derived from B. thuringiensis subspecies tolworthi; subspecies darmstadiensis; subspecies sotto; subspecies thuringiensis; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-290; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-120; subspecies thuringiensis, HD-2; subspecies kurstaki, HD-244; subspecies kurstaki, HD-73; subspecies kurstaki, HD-1; subspecies alesti, HD-4; subspecies toumanoffi, F-9; subspecies galleriae, HD-8; subspecies wuhnanesis, F-6; or subspecies morrisoni, F-5.

6. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the plasmid includes a DNA portion having substantial sequence homology to plasmid pBR322.

7. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the thus-produced plasmid is plasmid pES1 (ATCC Number 31995), plasmid pJWK20 (ATCC Number 31997) or plasmid pJWK18 (ATCC Number 31998), said plasmid optionally being mutated but retaining said expressible heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis.

8. A method of creating a genetically engineered bacterial strain which is capable of producing the crystal protein of Bacillus thuringiensis comprising transforming a host bacterial strain other than B. thuringiensis by introducing thereinto a plasmid which has been produced by a method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7 or progeny thereof whereby the expressible genetic material in the host includes heterologous DNA coding for the crystal protein of B. thuringiensis.

9. A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein the host is E. coli.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein the host is ES12, JWK1 or JWK11.

11. A method of preparing Bacillus thuringiensis crystal protein comprising growing a bacterial strain which has been created by a method as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 10.

12. A method of producing an insecticidal effect in an environment which comprises treating the environment with the crystal protein prepared by a method as claimed in claim 11, said crystal protein optionally being in the form of a formulation including a diluent, carrier or excipient.

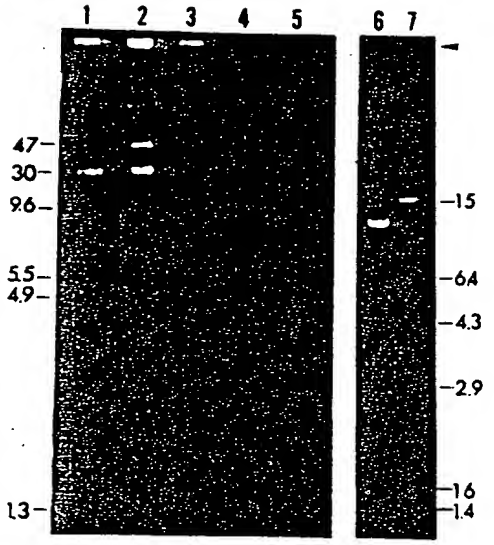

FIG. 1

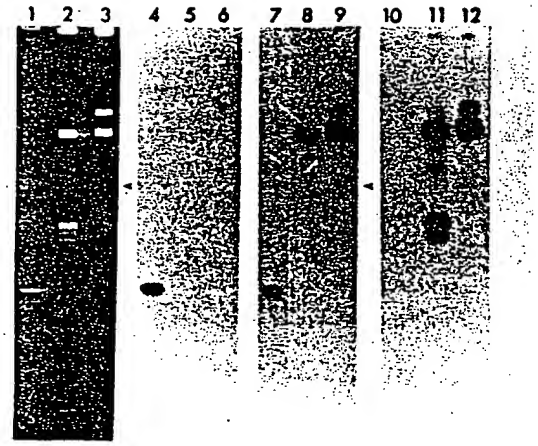

FIG. 2

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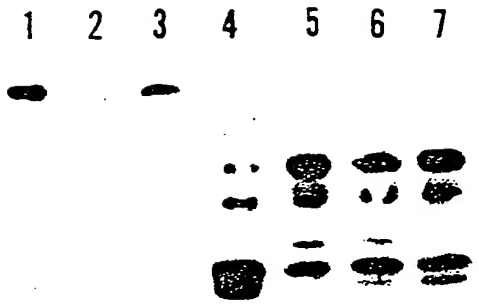

FIG. 3

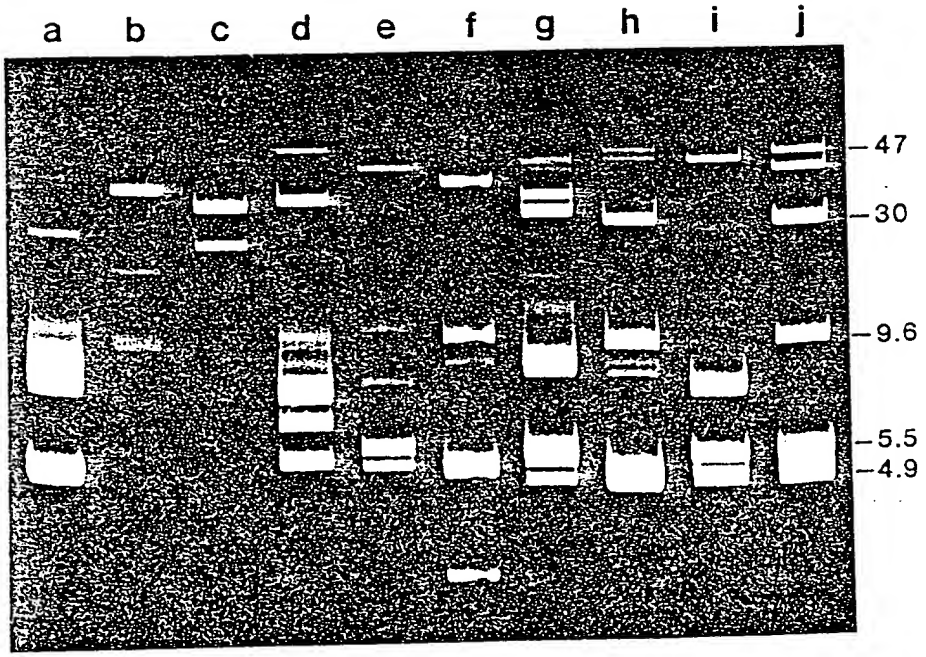

FIG. 4